

75 Years ago: “Battle of Cable Street” in London 1936 An Example for the Fight against the Nazis today

On 4th October 1936 3.000 followers of the “British Union of Fascists” led by Oswald Mosley intended to march in black uniforms through London Eastend. They were protected by an enormous contingent of police. The Mosley-Nazis partly orientated towards the Mussolini-Fascists, but more and more towards the German Nazi-Fascists. In London Eastend numerous Jewish people lived. For a long time the Mosley-Nazis had concentrated on terrorizing the Jewish inhabitants of this district. The demonstration of the nazis with antisemitic slogans like “The Yids, the Yids, we are going to get rid of the Yids” following the example set by the German Nazi-SA was a purposeful provocation against the Jewish people in Eastend. The British nazis also wanted to gain influence in this district mainly inhabited by workers.

The leadership of the Labour-Party and other appeasers had appealed not to withstand the march of the blackshirted Mosley-Nazis, but to stay away. “Peace and Order” were declared to be the needs of the moment. Hundred of thousands however were determined to stop the nazi-march under all circumstances and with any means necessary. An important background was: Three years had passed since the setting up of the nazi-fascist regime in Germany in 1933, and not long ago the armed struggle against fascism in Spain and against the intervening German nazi-fascism had begun.

On 4th October 300.000 antifascists shouting “They Shall Not Pass” confronted the planned nazi-march in London Eastend. This was the English translation of the anti-Franco-slogan “No Pasaran!” in the Spanish civil war. Despite a gigantic contingent of police the march of the blackshirted Mosley-Nazis was successfully stopped. The antifascist forces defeated the British nazis severely. Their influence declined considerably.



The “Battle of Cable Street”

In the run-up to the planned Nazi-march a lot of counter-demonstrators gathered at the antifascist meeting point Aldgate. In order to keep the precise route of the nazi-march secret, the fascist ganged up at several places – already accompanied by mocking laughter and catcalls. Then the antifascists got notice of the planned route leading through the Cable Street. They put up street barricades and blocked the route of the nazi-march. Arriving nazis were violently attacked several times.



For the construction of the barricades in the Cable Street a lorry and other heavy objects found on a site nearby were used. When the police wanted to clear the barricades, the antifascists ripped up the cobble. The police was attacked with a hail of stones and with firework. 4.000 policemen on horseback were called for reinforcement in order to break the blockade, but they weren't successful. Children threw marbles under the hooves of the horses so that these slipped and fell down. Bags filled with pepper were casted at the heads of the police horses. Residents threw garbage and other objects at the police and the nazis. The police carried out a lot of arrests and maltreated antifascist counter-demonstrators. But some arrested persons were freed again by the antifascists and one or the other policeman found himself contemporarily “arrested” (report in “Daily Worker”, October 5th 1936).

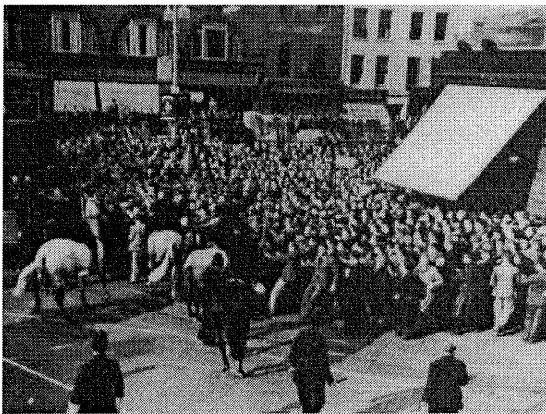
The counter-demonstrators acted organizationally very clever. They combined planning, which is necessary for such a fight, with improvisation, which is also required. Local “headquarters” were established. Motorbike- and bicycle-messengers were on their way in order to pass information. First-aid-stations for injured persons took up their work.



There were many organizations, which called for fight – for example “The Jewish People’s Council Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism” as well as several union sections and organizations for unemployed workers. The “Stepney Defence League” also played a part in these events. This organization had been founded by the Communist Party of Great Britain together with some courageous clergy men to fight militantly against compulsory evictions of flats. For this purpose one or the other barricade had been constructed.

The members and followers of the Communist Party of Great Britain at that time were the resolute core of the antifascist fight on October 4th 1936. During this period the party had great influence and was anchored in the unions, the companies and among the unemployed workers. It used its influence for a determined mobilization. The Communist Party of Great Britain at that time included a “Jewish Committee” in a central position. Articles and leaflets were also published in Yiddish.

A participant in these fights described the role of the CP-newspaper “Daily Worker” for antifascist mobilization as follows: *“The Daily Worker acted as the main organizer for the protests centrally. By midweek we were getting plenty of information and so were its thousands of readers, especially in the factories and workplaces such as the bus garages and the rail depots. (...) The Daily Worker printed a special supplement calling for ‘the biggest rally against fascism that has yet been seen in Britain’.”* The day after the “Daily Worker” propagated the militant actions against police and nazis.



In the “Battle of Cable Street” Jewish and non-Jewish people, communists and non-communists, union members and non-union-members, workers, intellectuals, artists, and other persons fought together against the nazis. We think that the determined and active manifestation of the progressive forces in the workers movement in order to defend the Jewish people, who were threatened by murderous antisemitism, is a shining example. The participating Bill Fisherman reported in 2006: *“We were all side by side. I was moved to tears to see bearded Jews and Irish catholic dockers standing up to stop Mosley. I shall never forget that as long as I live, how working-class*

people could get together to oppose the evil of racism.” (Guardian, 30.9.2006)

The planned nazi-march through the Cable Street in London Eastend had been prevented successfully! The anti-fascist forces gained strength and got even more determined. A former participant of the struggle reported in 1996: *“I was just one of a number of people who, as a result of what happened in Cable Street, felt that we had to do something to defeat fascism, to take up arms against it. Otherwise there would not only be many dead, but they also throw us back a thousand years. I went to Spain, the Communist Party were the prime organizers of this. I went to Spain in February 1937. I was an unemployed seaman. I was with the British Battalion, the*



Interbrigadists in the civil war in Spain

Major Attlee Company.” (Searchlight, October 1996)

... and the struggle against the nazis in Germany today

In the last years and decades the nazis became stronger again. More than 150 people have been killed by nazis since 1990. Day by day the nazis deliver their unbearable antisemitic hate campaign including their "Wir geben Gas"-propaganda ("We give gas!", "We accelerate!"). Week by week marches protected by thousands of policemen take place. Elections – as recently the German regional election in Mecklenburg-Upper Pommerania – show the influence of the nazis. Therefore for us in Germany today there is more than one reason to learn from the experience of the "Battle of Cable Street" in order to organize the joint struggle of antifascist forces and progressive union members. In our opinion four items are mainly important:

- One should not be kept from **intensifying the militant struggle against the nazis** by any appeasement policy;
- The struggle should be led in closest **solidarity with the persons affected by nazi hate campaigns and nazi terror**, so as Jewish people, Sinti and Roma, black-coloured people, muslims, homosexuals and other persons, regarded as "non-German" by the nazis;
- In a long-term perspective it is necessary that **the antifascist struggle gets a solid basis among the working people, anchored in the companies and in the unions**, without any illusions about the difficulties of this task, especially without any illusions about the reactionary role of the DGB- leadership (Federation of German Trade Unions) and its apparatus.
- The **international reference**, which was very lively present in the "Battle of Cable Street" especially in connection with the Spanish civil war, is also important today (regard the German policy of war in Afghanistan and elsewhere or the German policy of dominance and dictatorship against Greece and so on).

3th September 2011 in London: They did not pass again – Exemplary role of the RMT trade unionists in the struggle to prevent a Nazi-demonstration in the London Eastend

On 3th September 2011 hundreds of racists and fascists of the „English Defence League“ (EDL) wanted to march through the London district of Tower Hamlets. There are many black-coloured people, muslims, Jewish people, peoples coming from different countries... This provocation could be banned successfully.

An outstanding part had the RMT trade unionists. Already the day before the trade unionists alerted all stations and trains: EDL-fascists will not be transported. When EDL-fascists will appear, the station get closed.

On 3th September the EDL-racists wanted to start their march centrally from the station Liverpool Street. But nothing came of it. The RMT-unionists declared, that they will cease all their activities immediately, if the racists will appear. Nowhere the Racists could take the trains.

The resolute antifascist acting of the unionists gave fresh impetus to the antifascist protests. The fascists had no chance to come to Town Hamlets. Thousands were on the streets. EDL-fascists, who wanted to meet in Pubs, were not served and kicked out. The EDL-leader R. Robinson had disgracefully dressed up as a rabbi. But he had no use of this. The fascists could not pass.

When the EDL-Racists had left the region successlessly, the antiracist demonstrators marched in their thousands back down Whitechapel Road chanting „Whose streets? Our streets!“ and „Black and white unite and fight, smash the EDL!“.

On 3th September 2011 in London there has been demonstrated exemplary, which fighting capacity can develop, when unionists and antifascists fight together.

For us in Germany this is very important. Here in Germany Nazis can regularly travel with busses, with trains and underground to their meeting places. Until now there is no resistance against that by the employees of the transport companies. This must be changed, this is a task of all progressive unionists and antifascists.

**GewerkschafterInnen und Antifa gemeinsam
gegen Dummheit und Reaktion
(Trade unionists and antifascists together against stupidity und reaction)
– Who we are and what we are occupied with –**

It's decisively important that union members and antifascists really act TOGETHER "against stupidity and reaction" and that they practice SOLIDARITY with all people who are affected by capitalist exploitation, with all people who are threatened and suppressed by the German state, by the "German state of things". Such a cooperation is only possible, if it is based on a critical and self-critical discussion between union members and antifascists. One thing is obvious: appeasing and nationalistic-chauvinistic positions are widespread and one cannot go really forward without decisively fighting those. Therefore we try to interfere in the debates within the union and antifascist sphere with our own declarations and leaflets and try to push the discussions forward – as far as the topics seem important to us. Criticism and suggestions are explicitly desired. In this context we want to introduce some of our brochures and leaflets, which have been edited since 2003:

This is a translation of our leaflet No. 24

Some of our other publications so far only in german:

- **Documentation about the antisemitic-nationalistic frontpage-caricature in the newspaper of the "IG-Metall" (German union of metal workers) of May 2005 and some reactions following** (August 2005, 2. edition 2006), 48 pages, 2 €
- **What should be known about Lafontaine. Material about his reactionary positions** (September 2005), 12 pages, 0,50 €
- **Against the German-nationalistic frenzy during the football world championship 2006: REPRINT – Special issue of the *Arbeiter Illustrierten Zeitung* (AIZ) July 1936 – a document unmasking the nazi-olympic-games in Berlin 1936** (June 2006), 16 pages, 1 €
- **Against any kind of nationalism, racism and antisemitism – especially in the unions! Documents and material by critical members of the IG Bau, IG Metall, ver.di and GEW** (April 2010), 40 pages, 2 €
- **Nothing than football? A counter-kick. A documentation on the occasion of the football world championship 2010. Documents about German nationalism and the struggle against it** (August 2010, 2. edition July 2011), 28 pages, 2 €

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Our leaflets are also to find here: www.labournet.de/diskussion/rechten/gewantifa.html